

Message Text

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PAGE 01 PORT A 03423 101556Z
ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
SAB-02 AID-05 /062 W
-----048521 101559Z /45

P R 101320Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6179
INFO AMEMBASSY PANAMA
USIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT AU PRINCE 3423

E. O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PDIP, XM, PN, US, HA
SUBJECT: REACTIONS TO PANAMA CANAL TREATIES SIGNING CEREMONY

BEGIN SUMMARY. LATIN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY IN PORT AU PRINCE IS UNANIMOUS IN PRAISE FOR PRESIDENT CARTER AND ALMOST UNANIMOUS IN EXPRESSING DISAPPROVAL OF PRESIDENT TORRIJOS' ADDRESS ON PANAMA CANAL TREATY. DIPLOMATS' REACTIONS TO TORRIJOS' SPEECH RANGED FROM "UNDERSTANDABLE BAD MANNERS" TO "SHAME" THAT HE MISSED OPPORTUNITY FOR DIGINIFIED EXPRESSION OF LATIN VIEWS. ALTHOUGH SOME HAITIAN OFFICIALS REACTED WITH EFFUSIVE PRAISE FOR AGREEMENTS, THEY HAD LITTLE SUBSTANTIVE TO SAY-- BUT FEW HAITIANS HAVE EVER FELT PASSIONATELY ABOUT THE SUBJECT. END SUMMARY.

1. MANY OF LATIN CHIEFS OF MISSION PRESENT AT CHARGE'S RESIDENCE TO WITNESS TELEVISED SIGNING OF PANAMA CANAL TREATIES REACTED STRONGLY TO THE PANAMANIAN PRESIDENT'S REMARKS. THE MEXICAN CHARGE WENT SO FAR AS TO SAY HE WAS GLAD HIS PRESIDENT HAD NOT TAKEN PART IN SUCH A SHAMEFUL SPECTACLE. MOST AMBASSADORS THOUGHT TORRIJOS HAD BEEN TOO HARSH, PARTICULARLY IN HIS OPENING REMARKS ALTHOUGH THEY RECOGNIZED HE WAS SPEAKING MORE TO HIS OWN PEOPLE THAN TO THE AUDIENCE IN THE HALL OF THE
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AMERICAS. THE COLOMBIAN CHARGE FELT SLIGHTED THAT TORRIJOS DID NOT MENTION THE INTEREST OF OTHER LATIN AMERICAN COUNTRIES IN THE CANAL. HE FELT TORRIJOS SHOULD HAVE PLACED THE ROLE OF THE CANAL IN BROADER HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE REFERRING TO THE INTEREST OF BOLIVAR AND OTHER 19TH CENTURY LATIN LEADERS IN BUILDING THE CANAL. HE AND OTHERS THOUGHT TORRIJOS MISSED A CHANCE TO NUDGE THE US SENATE IN

THE DIRECTION OF APPROVING THE TREATIES. THE PERUVIAN AMBASSADOR, WHO KNOWS THE US BETTER THAN MOST OF HIS LATIN COLLEAGUES HERE, WAS IN A MINORITY. ALTHOUGH HE AGREED TORRIJOS SPEECH WAS UNCOUTH, HE THOUGHT THE FACT THAT IT FORCEFULLY REMINDED THE AMERICAN PUBLIC THAT PANAMA WAS NOT TOTALLY SATISFIED WITH THE TREATIES MIGHT HELP MAKE AMERICANS REALIZE THAT THE US DID NOT MAKE ALL THE COMPROMISES.

2. ON THE POSITIVE SIDE, THE LATIN AMBASSADORS WERE UNANIMOUS IN FEELING THAT THE TREATIES SYMBOLIZE THE END OF AN AMERICAN COLONIALIST PRESENCE IN THE HEMISPHERE. THEY ARE ENCOURAGED BY THE NEW RESPECT FOR THE RIGHTS OF INDIVIDUAL STATES REGARDLESS OF DIFFERENCES IN ECONOMIC MIGHT. PRESIDENT CARTER IS SEEN AS A STATESMAN WHO IS PUTTING HIS POLITICAL CAREER ON THE LINE FOR HIS CONVICTIONS. INDEED THERE IS ALMOST A GIDDY EUPHORIA IN THE LATIN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY ABOUT THE SINCERITY OF THE US COMMITMENT TO A NEW RELATIONSHIP WITH ITS NEIGHBORS TO THE SOUTH.

3. HAITIAN REACTION IS HARD TO MEASURE. THERE WERE SOME EFFUSIVE WORDS OF PRAISE FOR THE FACT OF THE AGREEMENT BUT HAITI HAS LITTLE STAKE IN THE PANAMA CANAL AND FEW HAITIANS HAVE EVER FELT PASSIONATELY ABOUT THE SUBJECT., JONES

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01-Jan-1994 12:00:00 am
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: CANALS, TREATY SIGNATORIES
Control Number: n/a
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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 22 May 2009
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1977PORTA03423
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Expiration:
Film Number: D770329-0044
Format: TEL
From: PORT AU PRINCE
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
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Legacy Key: link1977/newtext/t19770977/aaaacnmh.tel
Line Count: 86
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Litigation History:
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Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Retention: 0
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
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Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review Media Identifier:
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
SAS ID: 1318866
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: REACTIONS TO PANAMA CANAL TREATIES SIGNING CEREMONY BEGIN SUMMARY. LATIN DIPLOMATIC COMMUNITY IN PORT AU PRINCE IS UNANIMOUS IN PRAISE FOR PRESIDENT CARTER AND AL
TAGS: PDIP, EWWT, XM, PN, US, HA
To: STATE
Type: TE
vdkgvwkey: odbc://SAS/SAS.dbo.SAS_Docs/d5ef0d49-c288-dd11-92da-001cc4696bcc
Review Markings:
Margaret P. Grafeld
Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
22 May 2009
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009